



A FEAST OF THANKS

KENTUCKY GUARD RECOGNIZES EDUCATORS WITH A BANQUET

By Joe Brummett, Education Liaison Program Representative

The 2/75th Recruiting and Retention Battalion of the Kentucky Army National Guard (KYARNG), along with several other states, was recently selected by the Strength Maintenance Division of the National Guard Bureau (NGB-ASM) to participate in the initial kickoff of the new Service of Choice Educators' Banquet Program (EBP). The KYARNG has already coordinated several banquets across the state. To include a wide cross-section of Kentucky school districts, the KYARNG has held banquets in Hazard, Lexington, Louisville, Florence and Owensboro.

The EBP is another tool in a stream of innovative educational outreach initiatives recently unveiled by NGB to support recruiting and retention efforts. Designed primarily as a way to thank educators for their support, the banquets offer much more than that, according to MAJ Tammy Hurst, 2/75th RR Battalion Commander. "The banquets provide a wonderful opportunity to engage our educators in a warm and friendly environment," he said. "We are very serious about 'educating the educator' because they are the influencers in our schools and communities."

The EBP empowers recruiters and Education Liaison Program representatives to build and strengthen relationships with educators outside the traditional school environment. Educator

banquets also create a forum where teachers and administrators can learn more about the Guard. More importantly, the banquets are an opportunity for recruiters to get critical feedback from educators about what schools need and how the Guard can support them.

Recently at the Summit Country Club in Owensboro, KY, nearly 50 educators from multiple school districts enjoyed a meal and informative presentation about the Guard. Attendees included superintendents, guidance counselors, teachers, principals and a judge executive. Event coordinators included Area 8 Team Leader SFC Daren Bowen, Area 8 NCOIC 1SG Brad Harlan and the Area 8 Recruiting and Retention team.

COL Ron Turner, KYARNG Chief of Staff, and MAJ Hurst also attended the event. Hurst spoke to educators about the wealth of opportunities in the KYARNG. She discussed why people join the Guard, local economic impact, educational benefits, free school programs, enlistment options and the Guard's commitment to Kentucky schools.

The importance of and commitment to students and educators was evidenced by the attendance of COL Turner, who was instrumental in establishing unprecedented educational partnerships as a former Recruiting and Retention Commander (RRC) for Kentucky. "What a fantastic venue for two world-class groups of people to come together with the same goal—helping students—in mind," Turner said. "The program is a terrific way to recognize the people who truly change lives every day ... our educators."

SFC Bowen, who led his team in organizing the Owensboro event, said, "We have always had a great working relationship with our schools, but the Educator Banquet Program helps us take that relationship to a new level. One-on-one time with educators puts the Guard in a league of its own and promotes the Guard as the Service of Choice."

"I would recommend this program to any RRNCO that wants to build relationships with their schools and communities. It's a great opportunity to take educator relationships to a higher level," Bowen continued.

According to MAJ Hurst, the multiple partnerships the KYARNG has formed with educational organizations at the state, regional and local level are critical to the Guard's success.

"We have partnerships with different educational organizations, from career and technical educators to college admission counselors to school administrators. We are engaging students through classroom programs and providing resource support to Kentucky educational organizations," Hurst said. "We are simply doing what the National Guard does best, and that is giving back to our communities, and supporting and encouraging educators who in turn guide our young people as they journey to become strong, contributing members of society."

The highlight of the evening was a moving presentation of the Honorary Guardsman Award to James Inman (LTC, United States Air Force Retired).

"LTC Inman has served his country honorably and is a strong advocate for serving our country," said SFC Bowen, who presented the award. "He has promoted the military to our young people for many years. He is an asset to not only his community, but to the Kentucky National Guard as well."

LTC Inman was impressed by the Owensboro banquet, saying, "One of the major problems I have seen and experienced during my 22 years of military service and 27 years of government service is the resistance of educators to allow military discussion in the schools. Seeing the education community respond so positively to the National Guard was inspiring to this old military mustang."

Jessica Grimsley-Mounts, an English teacher at Daviess County High School who attended the Owensboro banquet, said, "Having a Guard member in my classroom is important for my students. They respond well to people who 'tell it like it is.' The real-life connections are an invaluable asset to my classroom."

"Through the working relationships I've created with our area's National Guard recruiters, not only have my students learned and benefited, but I have also," Grimsley-Mounts affirmed. **GX**

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